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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: DECEMBER 31, 2009

SUMMARY: Prime Minister Gilani's remarks reiterating his resolve to restore the 1973 Constitution during an address after the signing of the National Finance Commission Award dominated front pages on Thursday. Coverage of the aftermath of Monday's suicide attack in Karachi continued, with newspapers reporting the Taliban's claim of responsibility. Newspapers also reported that the police arrested the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan's Punjab Chief, believed to be the mastermind behind the Moon Market attacks earlier this month in Lahore. Pakistani media carried news of a suicide attack in Afghanistan's Khost province that killed eight American civilians. Reports that ten militants were killed during clashes with security forces in Mohmand Agency also received prominent coverage. An Urdu daily published a report that "secret agencies have forewarned of the preparation of 15 suicide bombers to attack American diplomats and foreign food chains in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Lahore." The English daily, "Dawn," reported that the "Pakistan Army is likely to seek U.S. Foreign Military Financing to acquire 20 SuperCobra helicopters to reinforce its fleet of ageing Cobra attack helicopters." The Urdu daily, "Nawa-i-Waqt," reported that "Pakistan and the United States have signed a preliminary agreement" requiring a "security clearance and the strict observance of rules and regulations" for the issuance of American visas. End summary.

TOP STORIES

News Story: 7th NFC Award Signed In Gwadar; Contest Polls And Check Your Worth, PM Tells Mush; Wants Mush To Pay For Killing Bugti, Abrogating Constitution - "The News" (12/31)

"The historic signing ceremony of the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award was held in the port city of Gwadar on Wednesday as the four provincial finance ministers signed the consensus document. Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, Federal Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin and members of the federal cabinet witnessed the historic event.... Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani has said the assassins of Nawab Akbar Bugti will be brought to justice as no one is above the law.... Prime Minister Gilani said dictator Pervez Musharraf now claims that he was very popular and the people of all provinces were looking towards him for the solution of their problems. He challenged him to contest a by-election to evaluate his popularity."

News Story: Taliban Own Karachi Ashura Carnage - "Dawn" (12/31)

"The Taliban claimed responsibility on Wednesday for the suicide attack on an Ashura procession which killed 44 people in Karachi and injured 60 others. The terrorist organisation threatened more attacks over the next 10 days, Asmatullah Shaheen, a top militant commander based in South Waziristan, told news agencies by telephone

from an undisclosed location."

News Story: Punjab Chief Of Tehrik-I-Taliban Pakistan Arrested - "Dawn" (12/31)

"With the help of intelligence agencies, police have captured Khalilullah, the Punjab chief of the proscribed Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, and a young man trained for suicide bombing. Khalil, who was said to be the right hand of late Baitullah Mehsud, allegedly masterminded the twin suicide bombings at Iqbal Town's crowded Moon Market."

News Story: 10 Militants Killed In Mohmand - "The News" (12/31)

"Ten militants, including commander Shahabuddin, have been killed and 18 others injured in a clash between security forces and militants in Chamar Kand, Tehsil Safi, Mohmand Agency. According to a spokesman, security forces also destroyed a hideout of the militants."

News Story: Army To Seek 20 SuperCobra Helicopters From U.S. - "Dawn" (12/31)

"The Pakistan Army is likely to seek U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to acquire 20 SuperCobra helicopters to reinforce its fleet of ageing Cobra attack helicopters, which are being extensively used in operations against terrorists in tribal regions. According to the Pakistan Assistance Strategy Report published by the U.S. State Department, the army envisions acquiring the SuperCobra helicopters."

News Story: Eight U.S. Civilians Killed In Afghanistan - "Daily Times" (12/31)

"Eight American civilians have been killed in an attack in eastern Afghanistan, an Embassy official and NATO said on Wednesday. The attack in Khost province was believed to be a suicide bombing, a Western military official told AFP."

News Story: Issuance Of Visas To Americans Made Conditional To Security Clearance, Observance Of Law; Agreement Signed - "Nawa-i-Waqt" (12/31)

"Pakistan and the United States have signed a preliminary agreement which makes the security clearance and the strict observance of rules and regulations conditional for the issuance of visas to Americans. In the first phase, visas would be issued on the pending applications of the DynCorps officials. According to a Foreign Office source, currently about 150 applications of the U.S. citizens for extension in the visas are being held in abeyance. He said that these applicants are suspected to be involved in dubious activities in Pakistan. The officials belonging to the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and other departments, which have reservations on the suspicious activities of the Americans in Pakistan, were also present in the negotiations held between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, the source added."

News Story: U.S. Diplomats, Foreign Restaurants May Be Attacked: Intelligence Reports - "Aaj-Kal" (12/31)

"The latest intelligence reports have revealed that 15 suicide bombers have been prepared who might target American diplomats and the foreign restaurants in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad. According to letter issued the Punjab police high-ups, terrorists having code names, Ejaz, Rafique, Hafeez, Zulfiqar and Haider have been assigned the target to attack the U.S. diplomats and foreign restaurants in these cities."

TERRORISM/MILITARY ISSUES

News Story: U.S. Wants Pakistan To Act Against Afghan Taliban: WSJ - "Dawn" (12/31)

"The success of the troop surge in Afghanistan hinges to a significant extent on whether U.S. officials can persuade Pakistan to crack down on Afghan insurgents on its side of the border, the Wall Street Journal said on Wednesday, citing senior U.S. officials."

The American officials also seek strong military action against what they call the Quetta Shura of Taliban which Pakistan has not acknowledged so far."

News Story: Obama Cites Security Flaws Amid Yemen Strike Reports - "Dawn" (12/31)

"Barack Obama lashed out at systemic intelligence failures over an attempted attack on a U.S. jet amid reports on Wednesday that Washington was planning reprisal strikes against targets in Yemen. The U.S. president was told on Tuesday there had been warnings of possible Christmas holiday attacks, and information that the Nigerian would-be bomber was a threat, but the data was not properly distributed."

News Story: Same Forces Behind May 12 Carnage, Ashura Tragedy: JI - "The News" (12/31)

"Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Pakistan Syed Munawar Hasan said that the same elements were involved in the May 12 carnage and Ashura tragedy whereas the involvement of RAW and Blackwater could also not be ruled out. The JI Chief has also urged the Supreme Court Chief Justice to take suo motu of the Karachi tragedy and expose the real culprits through a judicial probe."

News Story: Drone Attacks Sabotaging War On Terror: FO - "The News" (12/31)

"The United States has repeatedly been conveyed that the persistent drone attacks in tribal areas are damaging the ongoing war against terrorism, the Foreign Office Spokesman Abdul Basit said. Talking to a TV channel on Wednesday, he said, 'Drone attacks are not playing a positive role in the ongoing war against terrorism.'"

News Story: 19 Militants Nabbed In Swat - "The Nation" (12/31)

"The security forces have apprehended 15 suspected terrorists while four others surrendered in Swat and Malakand division, says an ISPR press release issued in Islamabad on Wednesday."

News Story: RAW Behind Unrest In Balochistan, Says Malik - "The News" (12/31)

"Federal Interior Minister Rehman Malik has said that Indian Intelligence Agency RAW is involved in creating unrest and terrorists activities in Balochistan, while talking to media persons in Gwadar on Wednesday, adding that investigation into this effect is underway."

News Story: Two NATO Tanker Drivers, Nazim Killed In Balochistan - "Dawn" (12/31)

"Two drivers of tankers returning after delivering oil to NATO forces in Afghanistan were shot dead in Mangochar, near Kalat, on Wednesday evening, according to police. Meanwhile, a Union Council Nazim and a motor mechanic were killed in Khuzdar by attackers riding motorcycles."

News Story: Mehsuds Asked To Hand Over 378 Men - "Daily Times" (12/31)

"The government on Wednesday handed a list of 378 wanted Mehsud tribesmen to the elders of the Mehsud tribe. It asked for their unconditional surrender with seven conditions, including respecting the law of the land, assuring to live in peace and not providing shelter to anti-state elements. Speaking at a grand Jirga held at the Political Compound Tank, winter headquarters of South Waziristan, the elders of the Mehsud tribe sought time until January 20 to thoroughly review the seven point conditions handed over by political authorities."

News Story: Terror Incidents Claimed 3,300 Lives This Year - "Dawn" (12/31)

"Over 3,300 people, including personnel of law-enforcement agencies and armed forces, were killed this year in terrorism-related incidents across the country. Suicide bombers struck every fifth day. Data compiled through newspaper reports. On average nine lives were lost daily."

News Story: U.S. Pledges \$16 Bn For Training Afghan Security Forces
- "The News" (12/31)

"The United States has pledged \$16 billion to spend on training and equipping Afghanistan's army and air force, but the country needs more to build a force that can guarantee stability, an Afghan army official said on Wednesday."

POLITICAL ISSUES

News Story: Third-Time PM Bar To Go, Says Gilani - "Dawn" (12/31)

"Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has reiterated his government's resolve to restore the 1973 Constitution in its original form and vowed to do away with the restriction on a person becoming prime minister for the third time, while speaking at a ceremony held in Gwadar on Wednesday for the signing of the 7th NFC Award."

ECONOMY/ENVIRONMENT

News Story: Vendors To Get Rs Three Billion: Zardari Announces Initial Help - "Business Recorder" (12/31)

"President Asif Ali Zardari has assured business community that a relief package will be announced for affected businessmen and shopkeepers of December 28th incident. Zardari also assured business community that government would provide Rs 3 billion as initial help for affected shopkeepers. The president was talking to a delegation of Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) at Bilawal House on Wednesday, he said that entire nation is mourning the said incident of bomb blast on the occasion of Ashura procession in which more than 43 innocent lives were lost and business community suffered huge losses in the hand of terrorists who torched a large number of shops and buildings."

News Story: No Data Available On Volume Of Smuggling Under ATTA - "The News" (12/31)

"The Ministry of Commerce is not aware of existing data or record of re-export of goods to Pakistan under the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) and the quantity of items smuggled through this facility. The ministry made this revelation before the National Assembly Standing Committee on Commerce, which met with Khurram Dastgir, PML-N Parliamentarian, in the chair to take up the recently concluded talks on Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA).... To a question about U.S. or any third party role, Khurram Dastgir told the reporters that the Ministry has assured the Committee, 'There will be no role either for U.S./World Bank or third party role in architecting new draft on APTTA.'"

News Story: 13.6% Power Tariff Hike From Tomorrow - "Daily Times" (12/31)

"In accordance with the conditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the government is likely to issue a notification declaring a 13.6 percent increase in electricity tariff on January 1, sources told 'Daily Times' on Wednesday."

News Story: Protest Against Gas Load Management, Proposed Price Hike: Potohar Region CNG Stations Go On Indefinite Strike - "Daily Times" (12/31)

"The twin cities' CNG filling stations on Wednesday went on an indefinite strike on the call of All Pakistan CNG Association (APCA).... While talking to 'Daily Times,' APCA Central President Ghayas Abdullah Paracha said 691 CNG Filling Stations Potohar Region including Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Attock, Chakwal and Jhelum were on strike on the call of APCA against the government's gas load management plan and proposed increase in gas prices from January."

MISCELLANEOUS

News Story: Afghans Vent Anger At Civilian Deaths; Protesters Burn Obama Effigy - "The Nation" (12/31)

"Protesters took to the streets in Afghanistan on Wednesday, burning an effigy of the U.S. President and shouting 'death to Obama' to

slam civilian deaths during Western military operations. Hundreds of university students blocked main roads in Jalalabad, capital of eastern Nangarhar province, to protest the alleged deaths of 10 civilians, mostly schoolchildren, in a Western military operation on Saturday."

News Story: U.S. Consulate General Karachi Launches Facebook Fan Page - "The Frontier Post" (12/31)

"Karachi's active and growing community of online networkers and social media enthusiasts will be joined this week by the U.S. Consulate General in Karachi, with the launch of its Facebook fan page (<http://www.facebook.com/karachi.usconsulate/>). The Facebook fan page aims to provide members information about the United States and activities of the American Consulate General in Karachi in order to promote bilateral and cultural ties between the United States and Pakistan."

EDITORIALS/OPINIONS

Editorial: 2009: An Intense Year, an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (12/31)

"As 2009 draws to a close, it leaves the Pakistani nation emotionally and physically drained.... Pakistanis have also suffered death and destruction as never before as a result of our partnership with the U.S. in its misguided "war on terror", which has created a most violent fallout for Pakistan.... The latest terrorism and its aftermath in Karachi showed the planned nature of the entire episode, meant to seem like a spontaneous angry fallout. All this has added to the ever present mistrust that defines the reality of the Pakistan-U.S. relationship, especially with the discovery of U.S. covert operatives and mercenaries like Blackwater and Dynacorp, all defying the law in Pakistan."

Editorial: The 'Hidden' Hand, an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (12/31)

"It would be tempting, and perhaps in accord with past practice, to blame the ubiquitous 'foreign' hand. But cooler reflection would indicate that the 'hidden' hand is very much indigenous and the injury suffered the result of self-inflicted wounds stemming from the past myopic policies of nurturing extremist militants for the export of jihad in the neighborhood. Wisdom may have dawned late regarding the fallout of such past misadventures, but painful as the present is, better later than never. An inherently difficult task of crushing these enemies of the people and the state can only be successfully conducted by mobilizing the citizenry and beefing up intelligence work to disrupt the terrorists' plans from within."

Editorial: Somebody Is Breaking Karachi's Backbone, an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (12/31)

"It is quite clear that somebody is trying to steel glitter of the city that is rightly described as economic nerve centre of the country. It is also worth mentioning that the attack and violence came at a time when due to efforts of the Government and the Army the situation in Swat and FATA was limping back to normalcy and anti-Pakistan elements were now fomenting trouble in new spots to keep the pot boiling."

Editorial: Wriggle Out Of Afghan Web Net, an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (12/31)

"Pressure is still being exerted on Islamabad to move in more troops on the border to check movement of Taliban. In our view that is no solution to the problem as Pakistan has to keep in view its own security upper most. While Islamabad is confronting the militants on its side of the border, it is the responsibility of Afghan and coalition forces to take care of militants escaping or entering the Afghan territory.... Additionally with advance air surveillance system, the U.S. can track the movement of militants and target them from the ground and the air."

Opinion: Holding The Consensus Against Militancy, an op-ed by Syed Talat Hussain in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily

"Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (12/31)

"All nations at war need leaders who rise above and outdo themselves in countering skeptical sentiments. Here in Pakistan, we have a strange situation. As soldiers and civilians get blown away in mortal combat or in heinous terrorism, the leadership is engaged in a bitter struggle for political survival. This insecurity at the top combined with rising urban terrorism is what has begun to slice away at the national consensus on how to deal with militants in Pakistan."

Opinion: A Year Of Living On The Edge, an op-ed by Dr. Maleeha Lodhi in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (12/31)

"At the close of the year the military operation had expanded to Orakzai and Khyber, but concerns about whether the militants had been dispersed rather than defeated suggested that Pakistan's counterinsurgency efforts would be a long haul. The danger that these efforts could be jeopardized and the army overstretched by the demands of the new regional strategy announced by President Obama became a key question as the New Year approached. The military escalation signaled by Washington's troop surge and the expansion in drone-launched missile strikes in the tribal areas heightened fears of further destabilization of the country."

Opinion: For Stemming The Rot, an op-ed by I.M. Mohsin in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (12/31)

"A Reuters report from Kabul over the weekend highlights that the Taliban have 'governors' in 33 provinces out of 34. This revelation was made, on condition of anonymity, by a senior NATO intelligence official stationed there. He rightly concludes: 'So he (the Taliban) has a government-in-waiting.'... This should cause no surprise to those who know the ground realities in the war zone. As the U.S./NATO try to swell their forces, they know that force is not the solution to the Af-Pak problem. Unlike the past, the present commanders are said to be highly educated. The woeful experience of the eight years resulting from the indiscriminate use of air power, killed many frequently. At times, even a puppet like Karzai had to protest openly. Such foolhardy tactics actually helped the Taliban tremendously. As per the traditions, the surviving kin are honor bound to avenge such killings.... In the interest of the U.S. and world peace, Obama should reach a viable settlement in Afghanistan with Pakistan's help."

Opinion: The Obama Year, an op-ed by Tariq Fatemi in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (12/31)

"A year in the White House and Obama is already a diminished figure compared to what he was when elected to the presidency.... In foreign policy, Obama enunciated his priorities of restarting the Middle East peace process, initiating a meaningful dialogue with Iran, ensuring a smooth wrap-up of the U.S. engagement in Iraq and achieving some success in Afghanistan to claim victory and leave.... On Afghanistan, the administration no longer talks of 'nation building'. The objective now is narrow: to weaken the Taliban and Al Qaeda within the next 18 months and to restore some semblance of order to that country to enable the U.S. to claim victory and pull out. Since the success of this strategy is dependent on Pakistan's cooperation, we can expect more of the carrot and stick in the coming months. But the President has to guard against his own Generals who want him to go down the same route that led to the destruction of the Johnson administration."

(All circulation figures are based on estimation)
Patterson